

Durham County Board of Social Services

Regular Session Minutes

January 17, 2024

The Durham County Board of Social Services monthly meeting was held on Wednesday, January 17, 2024, in the Conference Room 3234 with a virtual option via Microsoft Teams.

The following DSS Board members were in attendance: Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs and Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman; Board members: Jacqueline Beatty-Smith, Charles I. Mitchell and Wendy Sotolongo.

The Durham County Department of Social Services was represented by the following: Director Maggie Cveticanin, and Deputy Director Valery Dambreville.

Assistant Directors: Kimberly Lincoln (Interim), Rhonda Stevens, Jovetta Whitfield, and Cynthia Cason (Interim).

DSS staff attending included: Candice Leathers, Latoya Chambers, Meghan Russ, Nancy Santos, Kalindra Ellerbe, Quannah Jackson-Brown, Shontelle Smith, LaVelle Chesney, Susan Lee, Pamela Purifoy, Tonia Gay, Emma Perry, Lee Little, Carole Trimble, and Montrella Springfield

Danielle Briggs, Senior Assistant County Attorney was present.

James Hart, DSS Human Resources Analyst attended the meeting.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs called the January 17, 2024, regular meeting to order. The public charge was read by Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs.

Public Comments

Amamda Wallace attended via Teams.

Sheryl Smith attended in person.

Representative from Men and Women Boots on the Ground attended in person.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs moved forward with the proposed agenda until the public attendees arrived at the conference room.

Approval of the Agenda

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs asked the board members to review and approve the proposed agenda. The proposed agenda requires amending to add the approval of minutes. Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith offered the motion to approve the proposed agenda with amendments and Board member Wenday Sotolongo seconded.

The agenda was unanimously approved.

Board member	Yes	No	Abstained
Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs	Yes		
Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman	Yes		
Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith	Yes		
Board member Charles I. Mitchell	Yes		
Board member Wendy Sotolongo	Yes		

Approval of Minutes

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs asked the board members to approve the minutes for November 15, 2023, and December 18, 2023, regular meetings. Board member Wendy Sotolongo requested changing the year that recap her time working at the County Attorney's Office in the December 18, 2024, minutes. Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman offered a motion to approve the minutes for November 15, 2023, as printed and approve the December 18, 2023, amended minutes. Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith seconded.

The minutes were unanimously approved with the changes.

Board member	Yes	No	Abstained
Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs	Yes		
Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman	Yes		
Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith	Yes		
Board member Charles I. Mitchell	Yes		
Board member Wendy Sotolongo	Yes		

Chair Report

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs wished everyone Happy New Year and excited for all the opportunities ahead, especially with Medicaid Expansion providing healthcare to people in the community. Chair Commissioner Jacobs acknowledged a note from a community member about their son's quick notification of approval through Medicaid. Staff was also recognized for their work. Chair Commissioner Jacobs mentioned Medicaid Expansion at the Duke Regional Hospital Board of Trustees

Meeting and will be attending a board meeting at Lincoln Community Center.

Director Maggie Cveticanin will discuss building issues and steps being taken to help make sure the building is safe and healthy for staff.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs returned to Public Comments.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs welcomed Two guests Sheryl Smith and Representative from Men and Woman with Boots on the Ground

Each were given five minutes to speak.

Ms. Sheryl Smith attended the DSS Board Meeting to communicate concerns about specific children in DSS custody and asked for their cases to be reviewed.

The President of Men and Women with Boots on the Ground spoke in support of Ms. Smith's request for review/action.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs asked, and Director Cveticanin agreed to have Deputy Director Valery Dambreville speak with the parties in private regarding the confidential matter.

Vice Chair Commissioner Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman assured the family and Mr. Rasheed the Board heard their concerns.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs agreed with sentiments and ask board members for comments. Public comments were extended for Ms. Wallace to speak.

Ms. Wallace questioned the existence of a restraining order preventing her from attending the meeting in person or coming to the human services building. Ms. Wallace requested Director Maggie Cveticanin to contact the County Attorney about the order. Director Maggie Cveticanin contacted the County Attorney Office to follow up on the status of the restraining order.

Ms. Wallace claimed that Durham County has the second slowest in reunification rates in the state. She stated that this is a systematic issue and changes need to be made.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs thanked Amanda Wallace for her comments and closed public comments.

Director's Report

Director Maggie Cveticanin submitted a written report.

Director Maggie Cveticanin reported 7033 citizens have been served with Medicaid Expansion in Durham, which is the highest percentage of adults. The majority of positions for Medicaid Expansion have been filled.

NC DHHS launched a performance dashboard for 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. NC PRO Funds have been allocated as of close of business January 17, 2024. Clients were notified if they were not approved.

Director Maggie Cveticanin reached out to Russell Pierce, Director of Housing for New Hope and he agreed to host the roundtable for the housing issues. DSS will be represented at the meeting.

Allied4Outcomes will start working with the Quality Assurance Team January 17, 2024.

Northwood Traverse, the new case management system will begin January 23, 2024.

A contract is being drafted with CCR Consulting Firm to assist with FEI and Medicaid processes and policy assessment.

Director Maggie Cveticanin and Interim Assistant Director Cynthia Cason filmed a segment on Medicaid Expansion for Spectrum.

Director Maggie Cveticanin attended the Director's Association Meeting. The biggest concerns were the training for pre-service being placed on counties. Recent news focused on child welfare and requesting the State does not hold the counties to unattainable expectations with Medicaid Expansion due to the States's staffing issues and counties staffing issues.

Director Maggie Cveticanin presented Medicaid Expansion to the Partnership for a Healthy Durham. Duke representative pointed out the Hispanic communities need to be messaged that parents with children born in the United States should apply for Medicaid even if they don't have legal status. Director Cveticanin will work with partners to get the message to the Hispanic community.

Director Cveticanin mentioned two employees were taken to the emergency room within two days of each other complaining of headaches and other ailments. The County was asked to come and do an assessment of air quality. The results have not been received and there were no red flags from the evaluation. Director Cveticanin received notification on January 12th, a gas smell was coming from the Queen Street area, and it was assessed that carbon monoxide was in the air. The furnace and boiler are to close on the roof. The County is working on a permanent solution which will take time. A total of eighteen sensors have been installed throughout the building. There have not been any CO2 readings in Public Health and other areas. Readings will take place every morning before the agency opens and a log will be kept to review. Two mandatory meetings have been scheduled with staff to update them and the issue. DSS Leadership was asked to come up with a plan in case the environment changes and they are looking for other areas in the agency to move staff.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs thanked Director Cveticanin for her report and asked if Board members have questions.

Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman asked for clarification regarding staff taken to the emergency room. Were they taken to the emergency for inhaling fumes or separate incident. Director Cveticanin replied she does not know what tests were given but because staff were in the same area that prompted the air quality check assessment.

Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith inquired about a plan for staff working from home. Director Cveticanin stated that staff will be placed in other areas, they are coming on-site two days. There are a lot of clients coming in the office applying for services and we have to keep everyone safe. Public Health has offered space in that area if needed. County Department Heads have been notified and their top priority is staff safety. Director Cveticanin will be the board abreast of any changes.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs asked about the number of applications processed and does that include the State. There have been 7033 applications processed. Family Planning Medicaid was switched over on December 1, 2023. A little over 2000 in December but all may not have been due to Medicaid Expansion. Chair Commissioner Jacobs asked if you would know how many new applications received, eligible and approved which is important. Approximately 22,000 more people may be eligible for Medicaid. Is there any guidance from the State on a reasonable timeline. No reasonable timeline from the State currently. Interim Assistant Director Cynthia Cason met with Lincoln about a staff member housed at the Homeless Clinic two days per week. Interim Assistant Director Cason was on the call with Duke and others linked to the Spanish speaking community. DSS is looking at opportunities to go in the community and schools. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs acknowledged Director Maggie Cveticanin and highlighted initiatives for new Board member Wendy Sotolongo. Board member Wendy Sotolongo inquired about conversations around making sure the two systems sink if the State picks a different system. Is there an interface with NCFast. The State is aware there is a large percentage of counties coming aboard. There is no interfacing with counties except they have NC FAST.

Board member Wendy Sotolongo appreciated the explanation related to the management systems and Durham moving forward.

Family Economic Independence (FEI) – Rhonda Stevens, Assistant Director

Assistant Director Rhonda Stevens submitted a written report.

Assistant Director Rhonda Stevens indicated Food and Nutrition staff are busy. People are applying for benefits. Assistant Director Stevens highlighted the Division collected \$165.00 from staff to donate to the Helping Each Adolescent Reach Their Spark (H.E.A.R.T.S) to support their work in the community. FEI staff will attend the onsite UCIS Afghan Support Center event at the Durham Convention Center. Staff are providing information on programs and services.

Assistant Director Stevens mentioned outstanding hiring packets and trying to get staff onboard for training. Work First and FNS is busy, and outcomes are down. There are two long time staff in Work First Family Assistance carrying large caseloads due to new hires in training. Due to training of new staff, it will take time to get numbers back up.

Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman asked about the meetings to discuss strategies for timelines in FNS applications and recertifications. Have anything come out of the discussion in terms of innovative and changes you might want to implement. Assistant Director Stevens specified changing to daily staff meetings and go over the work that needs to be done. Shorten the time period for looking at cases and try to get ahead. Currently, doing little things rather than overwhelming. Staff are facing increased telephone calls, therefore, managing calls so it will not impact processing applications. Vice Chair Holsey-Hyman inquired about recipients reviewing their status online.

They can use NC ePASS to apply online and monitor their account online. Latoya Chambers detailed with ePASS accounts can be enhanced for text alerts, information can be uploaded to their application or recertification. Those are multiple options utilizing ePASS.

Director Maggie Cveticanin recognized Family Economic Independence and Medicaid staff. Staff have worked on Saturdays to process applications. Staff decided to come in on their own and processed applications. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs thanked staff for making a sacrifice making a difference in people's lives.

Medicaid – Interim Director Cynthia Cason

Interim Director Cynthia Cason shared December was a busy month in Medicaid. Over 4000 applications were received and the majority of them were electronic. Medicaid met the timeliness rate since April 2020 and determined to keep the trend. With the number of pending applications, processing days will probably increase. Staff came in on Saturday and processed 120 applications. They all had a bell and every time an application was completed a bell rang which encouraged them.

Out of 22 Medicaid positions, only 5 are left with recommendations at Human Resources. Eight new staff are training for Adult Medicaid and fifteen new staff will be trained for Family and Children. Quality Assurance staff are working hard to train new staff to assist with Medicaid.

Interim Assistant Director Cynthia Cason mentioned starting February 1, 2024, North Carolina will become a Federally Facilitated Marketplace determination state. Individuals apply for health coverage in the marketplace it they appear based on the information on the application and reveal potential eligibility for Medicaid, those applications will be forwarded to DSS to make determination. If applications move through meet requirement for eligibility for Medicaid, the application will be approved through the Federally Facilitated Marketplace.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs thanked Interim Assistant Director Cason and staff for their continued hard work. Board member Charles I. Mitchell extended gratitude for the great job staff are doing in Medicaid.

Customer Accountability and Talent Development (CATD) - Kimberly Lincoln, Interim Assistant Director

Interim Assistant Director Kimberly Lincoln reiterated the largest training groups starting Monday which include 15 new hires for Medicaid Expansion. There will be two trainers facilitating the classes. Staff have communicated the mentoring process with Medicaid.

Pamela Purifoy, Senior Public Information Officer has been successful providing communication to community through the media.

There have been 1611 additional calls through the call center in November and December.

The Quality Assurance Team is assisting with processing applications.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs recognizes staff are supporting different areas of the agency and there continues to be challenges. Chair Commissioner Jacobs appreciates the leadership and great work provided by Interim Assistant Director Kimberly Lincoln.

Vacancy Report

HR Analyst James Hart submitted a written report.

Board members congratulated James Hart on the birth of his daughter.

The vacancy rate is coming down closer to 10% which has a lot to do with results of the Job Fairs. Some of the internal expectations to have internal deadlines to get positions filled with the budget coming up.

Since October approximately 40 income maintenance caseworkers have been hired. There have been retirements and staff are working to fill critical positions. Retention will be a priority in 2024. DSS have about 607 FTEs, which is more staff the agency ever employed. Sign-on bonuses have been effective and there are good inquiries from individuals. A good investment from the County to add the critical positions and there is not only financial support but other incentives. Also, working to provide support to supervisors and managers.

Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman expressed gratitude to James Hart for moving the vacancy rate. There was a question regarding what positions have the sign-on bonuses. The current positions with sign-on bonuses are Income Maintenance II, Income Maintenance III, and Child Welfare Social Workers.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs highlighted Durham County 12 weeks Parental Leave Policy. According to James Hart, the County currently rolled out one policy 12 weeks paid parental leave for mother, fathers, and adoptions as well. There is also 6 weeks paid family leave to care for family members and 5 personal days per fiscal year. These benefits will keep staff from going into FMLA, therefore, staff don't have to use sick leave. Benefits along with salary are being communicated during recruitment. James Hart HR Analyst formally introduced himself to Board member Wendy Sotolongo look forward to working with the DSS Board. Board member Sotolongo expressed gratitude on a great work and congratulated him.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs thanked James Hart for the amazing accomplishments.

Aging and Adult Services (AAS) - Valery Dambreville, Deputy Director

Deputy Director Valery Dambreville submitted a written report.

Deputy Director Valery Dambreville stated Federal ARPA dollars ended, but the services will continue through other funded programs. Staff have been proactive with communicating services available to the community.

Low-Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP kicked off December 1, 2023, for seniors 60 and over along with disabled. Applications are coming in for assistance.

An audit for Meals on Wheels has been completed, and no issues were identified. The audit was conducted by Triangle J on Aging.

Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman asked how any people have taken advantage of the program to date. How is the information going out through the media? Meghan Russ, Program Manager reported over 1000 applications were completed in December. Program Manager Russ was interviewed on the news regarding the program. Sherry Rogers worked with Pamela Purifoy to get updates out to social media. Program Manager Lee Little mentioned the State does marketing for LIEAP throughout the state. Deputy Director Dambreville talked about the AAS Treat Day; supervisors brought in different treats for staff. Lee Little stated it was a three day treat for AAS division to wrap up the holiday season and mingle with each other.

Board member Wendy Sotolongo requested understanding of the acronym LIHR in the report. Low Income Homeowners Relief assist with paying taxes. Director Cveticanin will work with leadership to provide orientation for new board members.

Board member Sotolongo inquired about the low income energy assistance cap on individuals. Meghan Russ stated It is capped per household and

there is a state budget which has not been exceeded. It runs through March and usually funds are leftover. Last year funds were rolled into crisis intervention which is another financial assistance program for energy that runs low on funds by the end of June.

Questions relating to Events for December 2023. Lee Little indicated HOPWA is Housing for People with AIDS, this is a collaboration with the City of Durham which provides housing vouchers and case management services.

Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman suggested providing meaning of acronyms. Director Cveticanin will get the information to the Board.

Chair Commissioner Jacobs specified the LIHR program is a local program funded by the city and county through DSS. Property tax assistance is provided to fixed and low income residents. It is operated in partnership with the Tax Department. Every year Aging and Adult staff analyze the program for improvements.

Chair Commissioner Jacobs is concerned that NC PRO funding is depleted, and 132 applications are pending and have applicants been notified.

Deputy Director Dambreville reported that staff have been diligent in communicating with individuals about the next steps, but they have not been as effective. The housing crisis is a concern and staff have been advocating for families. Director Cveticanin mentioned a meeting will be held soon to bring all the experts to the table because the small programs cannot fix the problem. Chair Commissioner Jacobs questioned if there is a need to speak with the City and County for some type of emergency funding in the meantime? Director Cveticanin agreed with the suggestion. Deputy Director Dambreville agreed other agents that can assist would good.

Business Operations (BO) – Kelly Inman, Chief Operations Officer

Assistant Director Margaret Faircloth

Assistant Director Faircloth highlighted the budget. The County has officially kicked-off the budget and working in a paused budget this year. We don't want to ask for additional items, therefore, reviewing the current budget spending and reallocation.

DSS staff will not be keying in the system, reports will provide relating to revenues and other things to County Budget.

Meetings have begun with Northwood Traverse. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs asked what the pause on the budget is and will it be difficult. Assistant Director Faircloth cited, the thought is it is forcing departments to evaluate what you have and be held accountable. The difficult part for DSS is the unknown because we are State supervised, and County administered. Mandates have to be met and some can't be controlled. If we work through the reallocation with what we think is best, and the State comes in, we need funds then we go back to the Board of County Commissioners. There are additional dollars with Medicaid Expansion on the administrative side but the other part on the revenue side whole harmless with Medicaid E&E where we were receiving additional dollars and now outside that whole harmless. Now we are receiving an enhanced reimbursement for Medicaid 75% and then additional Medicaid Expansion funds.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs highlighted the staff engagement with Melissa Radcliff with Justice involving families and parents which is important.

Child and Family Services (CFS) – Jovetta Whitfield, Assistant Director

Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield submitted a written report.

Director Maggie Cveticanin acknowledged in December 1086 children and 1013 adults received gifts. Staff worked evenings and weekends. Child Welfare staff have a very difficult job being a case manager. Focus on reunification and doing the best job possible along with holding community and state accountable because child welfare is a systemic issue. Director Cveticanin thanked staff for working over the holidays. Chair Commissioner Jacobs and DSS Board thanked Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield for assisting them with purchasing gifts for Christmas. It is really important 2100 people were able to enjoy a better holiday.

This is a non-mandated program supported by the community, County Commissioners even though it is extra work for staff they enjoyed making sure families and children have something to look forward to during the holiday season. It is a tremendous lift on staff, they have gifts that have not been delivered because families were not able to pick up or unavailable, but staff will make sure they receive them. Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield thanked the community for their generosity.

The other item to highlight is the notification from the State back in December congratulating and celebrating counties for meeting the federal benchmark for Foster Home and Foster Care Visits. The State and Federal have a 95% rate. They commended counties that had 96% rate which is above the federal for doing visits monthly also they well exceeded the benchmark for just doing in-home and the benchmark is 75%. The State was at 93%, Assistant Director Whitfield commended staff that contributed to that because we always above the state standard or the federal standard of 95% of seeing kids in the home and in the community every month. Also, communicating with Public Schools as they transition to opening up the school system. Children and youth can have fair and equitable education so they are launched opening where you can apply for school.

We are educating resource parents and birth parents to make sure they are aware they have this opportunity to be in the lottery, but the school system is different.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs thanked Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield for the report. Staff was acknowledged for a great job and working with to educate parents about changes in Durham Public Schools. Cooperative Extension provides special events and outreach for young parents and families, especially Spanish speaking. Exciting to see the DSS partnering with Durham Public Schools on this change.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs thanked staff for attending and entertained a motion to move to closed session.

- NCGS 143-318.11 (a)(6) To consider the qualifications, competence, performance, character, fitness, conditions of appointment, or conditions of initial employment of an individual public officer or employee or prospective public officer or employee; or to hear or investigate a complaint, charge, or grievance by or against an individual public officer or employee. General personnel policy issues may not be considered in a closed session.

Board member Charle I. Mitchell moved and Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith seconded.

Board member	Yes	No	Abstained
Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs	Yes		
Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman	Yes		
Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith	Yes		
Board member Charles I. Mitchell	Yes		
Board member Wendy Sotolongo	Yes		

The DSS Board returned to open session, no action taken.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs adjourned meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

_____	_____
Chairperson	Date

_____	_____
Secretary to the Board	Date